Benefits of Using Volunteers

The Volunteers in Police Service (VIPS) Program is a national program which provides support and resources for law enforcement agencies interested in developing or enhancing a volunteer program and for community members who wish to volunteer their time and skills with a community law enforcement agency. Local VIPS programs offer direct volunteer opportunities and conduct their own screening, recruitment, and placement.

There are many different types of volunteer programs and volunteer opportunities, including:

- Administrative assistance
- Citizen patrol
- Citizens’ advisory board
- Speakers bureau
- Neighborhood Watch
- Crime mapping and analysis
- Search and rescue
- Cold case squad
- Victim assistance
- Disaster response
- Graffiti abatement
- Special events
- Translation
- Crime prevention
- Explorer Post
- Internship
- Chaplain
- Reserve officer

The President’s Council on Service and Civic Participation created the President’s Volunteer Service Award program as a way to thank and honor Americans who, by their demonstrated commitment and example, inspire others to engage in volunteer service. The program recognizes individuals, families, and groups that have achieved a certain number of volunteer hours served over a 12-month period or cumulative hours earned over the course of a lifetime. Adults can begin earning an award at 100 hours of service. Individuals can earn the President’s Call to Service Award once they have provided 4,000 hours of service over the course of their lifetime. Award recipients receive an official President’s Volunteer Service Award pin, a personalized certificate of achievement, a note of congratulations from the President of the United States, and a letter from the President’s Council on Service and Civic Participation. Many local VIPS programs participate in the President’s Volunteer Service Award program.

President George W. Bush created USA Freedom Corps (USAFC) to build on the countless acts of service, sacrifice, and generosity that followed September 11. As a White House office, USAFC is charged with building a culture of service, citizenship, and responsibility in America. Citizen Corps, a
vital component of USAFC, was created to help coordinate volunteer activities to make communities safer, stronger, and better prepared to respond to any emergency situation. Citizen Corps partner programs build on the successful efforts in place in many communities around the country to prevent crime and respond to emergencies. VIPS is one of five Citizen Corps partner programs. The International Association of Chiefs of Police manages and implements the VIPS Program in partnership with, and on behalf of, the White House Office of the USA Freedom Corps and the Bureau of Justice Assistance, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. The program’s ultimate goal is to enhance the capacity of state and local law enforcement to utilize volunteers.

While law enforcement agencies are designed and staffed to maximize services to the community, there is always more to do. Consequently, and as a result of recent economic strife, agencies are experiencing an increased workload in a resource-constrained environment. More than ever volunteerism has become a need and not a luxury.

**Maximizing Resources**

By providing supplemental and/or support services, volunteers allow law enforcement agencies and officers to focus on policing and enforcement functions. Investing in a volunteer program can help law enforcement agencies fulfill their primary functions and provide services that may not otherwise be offered. The financial return on investment of a volunteer program can be substantial, amounting to millions of dollars.

**Enhancing Public Safety and Services**

Volunteers provide services that the public wants but that sworn or civilian staff may not have the time to furnish. These services may include fingerprinting children, patrolling shopping centers, checking on homebound residents, or checking the security of vacationing residents’ homes. Additionally, volunteers participating in non-hazardous, non-enforcement activities such as citizen patrols or Neighborhood Watch programs can function as extra sets of eyes and ears.

**Improving Community Buy-in**

Volunteers can also enhance law enforcement-community relations. A community member who volunteers with a local law enforcement agency will have a better understanding of that agency and law enforcement as a whole. Volunteers can serve as well informed ambassadors in your community and will have credibility within the community as they are supporting law enforcement without monetary compensation.

**VIPS Resources**

The VIPS Program offers a number of resources for law enforcement agencies and citizens interested in law enforcement volunteer programs.

The VIPS Program makes available the following resources:

- A Web site containing a directory summarizing volunteer opportunities available in law enforcement agencies across the country. The directory is a searchable resource for agencies that
are looking to network with programs offering similar or desired volunteer roles. It also serves as a resource for citizens searching for volunteer opportunities;

- A library of sample documents and forms, including policies and procedures, position descriptions, training materials, and screening forms.
- *VIPS in Focus*, a publications series that builds on this resource guide. The series addresses specific elements and issues related to law enforcement volunteer programs;
- A model policy and concepts and issues paper developed in collaboration with the IACP’s National Law Enforcement Policy Center;
- A technical assistance program to help local agencies determine their volunteer needs and design programs that will effectively meet those needs;
- A mentor program that pairs experienced law enforcement volunteer coordinators with coordinators in need of support; Volunteer Programs
- Enhancing Public Safety
- Five educational videos covering such topics as program implementation and incorporating youth in law enforcement volunteerism;
- CD-ROM on Supporting Law Enforcement Volunteer Efforts: Resources to Enhance Public Safety;
- *VIPS Info*, a monthly electronic newsletter that provides news and lists events about law enforcement volunteer activities around the country;
- *VIPS Stories*, a section of the VIPS Web site recognizing VIPS law enforcement volunteer programs that have recently been in the news and cross-linking them to their respective program pages; and
- VIPS to VIPS, a moderated online discussion group for law enforcement volunteer program leaders to share information and ideas.